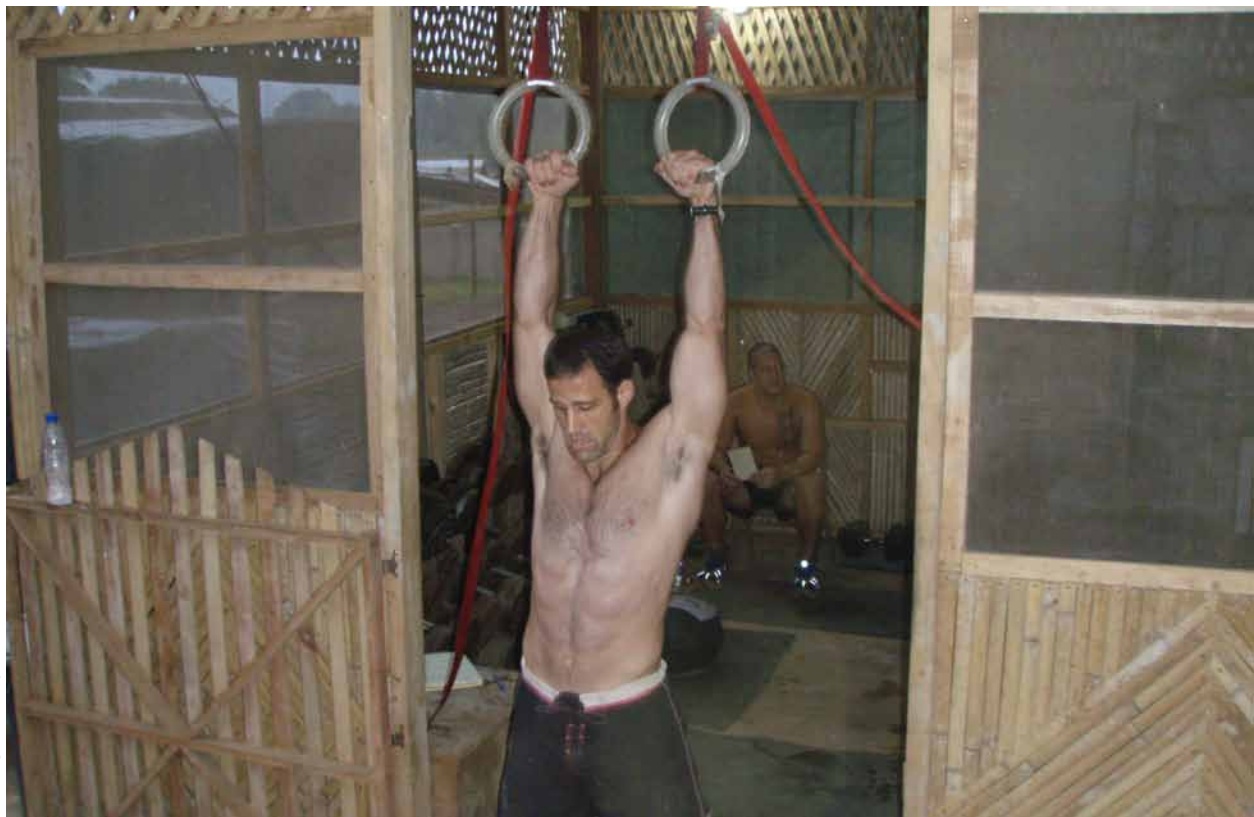

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Dot-Com While Deployed

Dan Fuhr recounts years of deployment with one constant: CrossFit main-site workouts.

By Dan Fuhr

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All images courtesy of Dan Fuhr

I turn 35 in January, and I've been following CrossFit main-site programming regularly since January 2007. I am also in the U.S. Army, and since January 2007 I have been deployed for 28 months. I've spent another six months away for training. Surprisingly, I'm still single.

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For a soldier, a well-equipped gym like this isn't always available.

With the exception of being fortunate enough to spend two months training weekends in Austin's premier CrossFit facility, CrossFit Austin, with Wes Kimball, Chad Vaughn, Boone Putney, Miguel Garza and Tristy Stephens, I have almost solely been working out on my own, outside a box, following main-site programming while on deployments.

I returned from my last deployment at the end of January 2010. I went on leave for the month of February. The weekend of March 12-13, I finished fifth in the Southern Texas and Louisiana Sectional. At the beginning of May 2010, I drove cross-country to California for my next assignment in the army. On the weekend of May 28-29, I flew to Dallas and finished 10th in the South Central Regional.

I was introduced to CrossFit and have regularly followed main-site programming even while deployed. I do not think my experiences or results are that unique. I'm just a guy who worked out as hard and as regularly as the situation allowed once I fully embraced CrossFit.

CrossFit: More Than Fran

I first heard about CrossFit from a friend back in the fall of 2005. The idea of functional fitness performed at high intensity sounded like something more real and less faddish than the other silliness on functional fitness being promoted by people like Matt Fury. I went to CrossFit's website and just glanced. Fran was the WOD on the day of

my visit. For the next couple of months, I would randomly do Fran one or two times a month and think I was doing CrossFit. My form on pull-ups was ridiculous. My chin would move from about two inches below the bar to about an inch above the bar. However, I couldn't complete the workout in less than five minutes, and I was a puddle of mud at the end.

A couple of months later, another friend told me about another WOD, Linda. He said something like, "You got to check out CrossFit. It uses weights to develop cardio." I replied, "I know. I'm doing CrossFit once or twice a month already." After the conversation, I then added Linda to my routine and thought, "Now I'm really doing CrossFit." About a year after first visiting CrossFit.com, I revisited the site and realized it was so much more than just two WODs.

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I ordered a bar and bumper plates, a squat rack, and gymnastic rings, and I built a platform. I got everything set up in my garage and was so proud of my first gym. Every Saturday morning, some friends would come over and we would hit a workout from the main site. However, other than the Saturday workout that came off the main site, my training was still random.

WODs at War

At the beginning of January 2007, I was deployed to the “lesser-known War on Terror”: Operation Enduring Freedom—Philippines (OEF-P). A couple of days later, we landed in Zamboanga, Philippines. The next day, we got on a boat. I remember the boat was this flat-bottom transport that had been in service since World War II. After fighting seasickness for over 18 hours, we finally stepped onto Jolo Island the following morning.

Jolo Island is part of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM). It is one of the poorest and most undeveloped parts of the Philippines. The island doesn't even have a Jolly Bee or Chow King. If you have been to the Philippines, this will help bring perspective. The island

has approximately 130,000 residents. Essential services such as electricity, water and sewage reach fewer than 50 percent of the population. The island is also home to the world's longest insurgency. This is where I spent the next six-and-a-half months.

A lot of guys when they deploy set goals outside of work to keep the time passing. I made it one of my goals to follow main-site programming as closely as possible while I was on this deployment. However, on deployment a lot of times work prevents the pursuit of other goals. On this deployment, I was fortunate. With the exception of a few sleepless nights, conditions were great, considering I was overseas. My living conditions were good, and for the most part I could find time to exercise.

For my first five months in country, I lived on the island's main camp. We had about a three-quarter-mile loop we could run. Besides everyone burning their trash in the morning and the 90-plus degrees and 90-plus-percent humidity that can be expected every day in the southern Philippines, it was good for training. There was a gym with bars, plates and a squat rack. A basketball filled with dirt subbed as a medicine ball. I brought a set of rings with me.



Some overseas facilities boast a good collection of gear, but sometimes a soldier has to get pretty creative.

We had pull-up bars built outside our house and marked 400-meter and 800-meter turnaround points. It was a good set-up. The set-up got even better when a new unit came in with a commander who was a CrossFit super stud. Soon we all got C2 rowers.

My diet was also good. Every week, we would pool our money and purchase groceries. Mangos, bananas, avocados for (5 cents apiece), ridiculously big cucumbers to offset the ridiculously small onions, tomatoes, as well as lansones, mangosteens and a whole bunch of other tropical fruits I've never heard of before were plentiful. Leafy greens were something I never saw, and salad was something I missed more and more as the time went on. Unfortunately, salad can't be put in a care package and mailed out.

When the locals found out we ate seafood—the guys we had replaced did not—every day someone would come to our house with fish. About once a month, we'd splurge and get lobster. Chicken and eggs were also common. Beef and pork were less frequent. Every day, I or one of the guys I lived with would cook dinner. Leftovers would be lunch the following day. Breakfast was usually a meal-replacement shake and oatmeal. I ordered from BodyBuilding.com on all three deployments, and they have always provided great service. For the most part, work was moderate and allowed time to get into a three-days on, one-day-off exercise routine from the main site.

I know I was really fortunate to have this situation. I have other friends who have spent months living under a tarp in Afghanistan. I asked one if he worked out. I got the "are-you-crazy look" and was told, "No, we were too busy fighting." I saw their pictures. They had dropped 20 lb. of body weight from exposure to the elements and a couple of months of eating nothing but MREs, and they had big, wild beards from relaxed grooming standards. My buddy more looked like a burned-up prospector you'd find stumbling around the desert than a U.S. soldier.

Relocation and Creative WODs

I lived on the island's main camp for my first five months. Then I was moved to one of the outstations. The three-quarter-mile loop was replaced by a volcanic lake, and the number of Americans went down to me and my team. There was nowhere to run. We were on a hill, and everything was covered in mud. We did have a small gym. Soon after arriving, Navy SeaBees came out to our location

to build a school as part of a humanitarian mission. In addition to the school, they built us a lifting platform, and we could continue with more CrossFit WODs. I was only at this house for a month before my team and I got moved to another outstation.

After moving to our new location, I went back to the States for a two-week R&R. I came back to the new house in August 2007 and remained there until I finished the deployment at the end of January 2008. This house had a half-mile running loop and a small gym that we kept expanding as the time went on. We ordered a Dynamax ball and built a backboard for wall-ball shots on our water tower. Besides a squat rack, we had everything to complete most WODs.



Bolting a backboard to a water tower made wall-balls an option in the Philippines.

This was my happiest time on the deployment. Every night, the whole house would get together and hit the WOD of the day from the main site. These guys became my best friends and are still some of my best friends today. People started referring to our house as Fuhr Fitness. I kept saying, "No, this is CrossFit Jolo," but Fuhr Fitness stuck and has continued to stick, I guess now by my choice.

A buddy in another house didn't have Internet access. Every day, we would text him the WOD over the radio so his house could keep up with the training. Despite some interruptions from work, we followed the main site for the last several months of the deployment. We all reached significantly higher levels of fitness over the course of the deployment. I went from doing 25 kipping pull-ups to 45 kipping pull-ups. My time on Fran went from over 4 minutes to 3:07. My score for Cindy at the start was 18 rounds. By the end I could do 27. In the beginning, my form was not too legit. I had to cheat to get through a lot of the workouts. By the end, I was getting full range of motion.

My diet did get worse living off the main camp. Still, every week we would pool our money, but instead of the daily fish guy coming to our house, we would give the weekly pool of cash to a local who would buy our week's

groceries. My diet shifted. Breakfast remained the same with a meal-replacement shake and oatmeal, but almost every night, dinner became boiled chicken spiced up with something from a care package. Lunch became a can of tuna with white crackers, and snacks were usually protein powder and more white crackers. Eggs were also always present. Every week, we would buy seven flats of 30 eggs. Due to the spoiling of produce in the weekly groceries, I really began neglecting fruits and vegetables. Again, salad was what I missed the most.

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While deployed, a soldier's diet also experiences some changes, some good, some bad.



Flying home to the U.S.

I finished that deployment and returned to the States at the end of January 2008. All the guys on my team that I worked out with every day for the last couple of months went back to their wives and children. I was hooked on the three days on, one day off and continued training from the main site on my own. I continued training and coming up with substitutions when I went away to schools. I went back to OEF-P for a short three-month deployment. Living conditions and diet were good and training continued.

Rough Times Ahead

I returned in September 2008 and walked into an opportunity to go to Iraq as a staff primary for a Brigade Combat Team. As part of the train-up for Iraq, I went to the National Training Center (NTC) in Fort Irwin, Calif. NTC is a miserable experience. It is a month of sucking for the sake of sucking. I never went to bed before midnight, and I never woke up after 0600 for the month I was there. Once we got in the box, I would usually get back around 0130, conduct personal hygiene and get to bed by 0200. I know other people work significantly more during NTC, and some pretty much go ironman for the two weeks in the box. Diet was throwing down an MRE or army chow as fast as possible so you could get back to work for more sucking. There was no time for a dedicated workout. But I did find time to duck behind a tent and knock out 8 rounds of Tabata squats or Tabata push-ups almost daily.

I deployed to Iraq at the beginning of February 2009. NTC was good training for Iraq. The first three months of Iraq felt really similar to NTC, except it didn't go on for 2 weeks; it went on for three months. My blood pressure went up to around 140 over 90 and would remain at that level for the rest of the deployment. The doctor told me it was because of genetics and aging. I asked, "Are you sure? Are you sure it's not the job?" Before I deployed and after I returned, my blood pressure was/is around 115 over 55. During the first three months, I worked out about once a week, and the extent of the workout was limited to stopping by the gym on my way to dinner, taking off my jacket and throwing some weight before throwing down chow and getting back to the office.

Surprisingly, I made strength gains. I thought they might have been putting steroids in our food as part of some sort of sick experiment like in the movie *Jacob's Ladder*. The strength gains, high blood pressure and mood swings were there, but definitely no increase in libido!

After three months, we started falling into a rhythm and got to sleep in Sunday. Every day, except Sunday, started with a 0800 brief. I was usually in the office till around 2330. I tried to get out before midnight because my attitude got even worse. I know some people worked significantly more. I remember being in meetings at 2300 and guys would have two cans of Rip It, a generic form of Red Bull, in front of them. I remember thinking, "These guys aren't going to go to bed until 2 or 3 in the morning." That is how it was for some. They really wouldn't go to bed till 0200 or 0300 and would be back up at 0600. I think a lot of people were trying to play a game to see who could work themselves to death first. I was trying to lose.

The diet for my first seven months was bad. We were not on one of the large bases with contracted dining. We had army cooks who tried to do the best they could. Meals were heavily processed forms of meat and starch. Fresh fruits and vegetables were very limited, but there was always enough to eat. I know some of the further outstations were living off MREs, cereal, "loser sandwiches" of one slice of baloney, and some form of generic hot pocket when they were lucky. About once a week we would all contract some sort of abdominal difficulty. I think it was because the bacterial levels in the food would reach dangerous levels. Add in chemical toilets and a lack of effective plumbing in the shower and latrine units (SLUs), and the situation was even worse.

When things settled down after my first three months, I was able to fall into a regular workout routine. Unofficial free time became from 1700 to 1900. I began leaving the office at 1700, working out, throwing down dinner and then getting back in the office by 1900, where I would stay till around 2330.

Also around three months in, we started having chapel service on Sunday and didn't have to be in the office till after lunch. On Sundays I would sleep in a little later and then go to church. After lunch, the day became the same as every other. Reports, meetings and preparing for meetings would go on till 2330.

Despite the less-than-ideal conditions, I finished off the year with significant improvement in my WOD scores.

I can't communicate how miserable that deployment to Iraq was. The only thing that would have made the deployment more miserable for me is if I had been forced to put a rock in my shoe and walk around like that for the rest of my time in country. I remember we had a 3-hour mission analysis meeting on the Fourth of July. During that meeting, I kept hoping we would get mortared just so the meeting would end. Unfortunately, or maybe fortunately, there were no fireworks that year.

For my last five months of the deployment, I moved to Taji. Taji is one of the larger bases over there. It has a huge contracted dining hall with all the amenities. There was a rotisserie chicken bar, carving station, sandwich bar, pasta bar, huge salad bar, fresh-fruit carving station, dessert bar with Baskin Robbins. Every week there would be seafood night with lobster and king crab. It's no wonder how fat some people get on deployment. For me, my diet significantly improved with the healthier choices of protein and large salad and fresh fruit bars.

The work routine continued. Every morning started at 0800 except sleep-in Sunday, and every night I'd be in the office till around 2330. 1700 to 1900 remained unofficial personal time, which allowed me to get a workout, get dinner, and get back in the office. The last three months in country I began teaching the Brazilian jiu-jitsu club twice a week. I'd teach from 2000 to 2130. After I finished teaching, I got back in the office and stayed till 2330. I think I only watched two movies that year and maybe read four books outside of work.

Despite the less-than-ideal conditions, I finished off the year with significant improvement in my WOD scores. I don't want to say "significant physical improvements" because I think the poor diet for my first seven months in-country and the stress from work took years off my life, but following the main-site programming led to significant gains in my WOD scores. I finished off the year with a 1075 CrossFit total (425-lb. squat, 195-lb. shoulder press, 455-lb. deadlift). This was the most weight I had lifted since college, but I had significantly more endurance. I ran 2 miles in 11:35. My Fran time was 2:37. My Helen time was 7:37. I could do 30 rounds of Cindy.

I took these times to the Southern Texas and Louisiana Sectionals about a month after getting back from Iraq and placed fifth. I continued following main-site programming leading up to the regional competition while still having to do unit physical training (PT) every morning. I have been in the Army for over 11 years, and I have successfully avoided unit PT since December 2002.



Despite the conditions of his deployment, Fuhr still placed fifth at sectionals and earned a spot in the regional competition.

Unit PT typically consists of a less-than-half-assed exercise program revolving around push-ups, sit-ups, and 2-4 mile runs done between 0630 and 0730 every morning. One person is assigned to lead the exercise program, and that person is almost always more concerned about developing his ego than in developing fitness—hoo-ah bullshit at its worst. It is extremely rare for physical improvements to be made from unit PT. Unit PT may prevent soldiers from becoming complete fatasses, but based on the butterballs I saw waddling around the brigade, I'm not so sure. Unit PT is an evil of the conventional army. My luck for avoiding unit PT ran out when I became a BCT staff primary.

About a month before the regional competition, I finally got orders to my next assignment in the army and moved to California. I followed the main site the best I could during the cross-country drive and as I got settled into a new place. I ended up finishing 10th in the South Central Regional. I did not get selected to go to the Games. Only the top four got a slot. What more can I say? The competitions were great experiences, and the journey over the last couple of years was an experience in itself.

Making Do, Staying Fit—Always

In this article, I wanted to write about my experience with getting introduced to CrossFit and my experiences doing CrossFit and main-site programming while deployed. As I said, I don't think my experiences are unique. I'm certain a lot of other guys have stumbled into CrossFit, fell in love with it and continued doing CrossFit in spite of their environments.

Several years ago I heard a quote by Theodore Roosevelt: "Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." I have been trying to live around this quote. I know there are many others in the CrossFit community who are doing the same. I'm glad to be a part of it!



About the Author

Dan Fuhr currently resides in Monterey, Calif, where he is pursuing a master's degree in defense analysis. In 2010, he finished fifth in the Southern Texas and Louisiana Sectional and 10th in the South Central Regional. He recently started his own box, [CrossFit Fuhr Fitness](#). If you are in the Monterey area, please send Dan a line to hit a workout.